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From: Wil

To: Bill Woody

Sent: Thursday, October 07, 2004 11:37 AM

Subject: M.V. Le Conte grounding of 05-10-04

Greetings once again Mr. Woody;

Would you be so kind as to provide me with a Fax# and mailing address where by I might send items of pertinence to you? In particular, they would be copies of letter's from masters and mates regarding the work rest issue and the work log of the permanent Chief mate on the Le Conte.

As you know, I have stated that in my opinion that fatigue was the primary factor resulting in a causal chain that led to this grounding. This is of grave concern to me because AMHS vessels are still operating under these conditions. Having just completed a bridge resource management class; it has become apparent tome that AMHS vessels are not and have not ever implemented bridge watch standing procedures that comply with the requirements of STCW concerning Bridge Watch conditions, being as AMHS vessels operate 24/7 in condition 3 and 4 waters. There are no codified watch standing parameters extant in the AMHS fleet.-At least none that comply with these conditions.

Knowing full well that having such a codified plan is mandatory and AMHS management having been informed on many occasions of the excessive workload imposed by operating ships in the year 2004 in the same manner and with the same onerous watch structure essentially unchanged in 40 years, AMHS management operates vessels that are inherently unseaworthy due to non-compliance with STCW regulations and the fleet wide fatigue as is experienced by all deck officers(and engine room personnel) resulting from the demands of a 6 on 6 off watch schedule and in the case of non-watch standers the frequent interruption of Rem sleep imposed by frequent port calls common to short-sea shipping.

I don't know how far you've had a chance to get with this yet; but I would like to mention a mechanical issue which may have contributed to this grounding. The Master of the Le Conte, Capt. Williamson reminded me(and this did not occur to me as a possible contributing factor at the time of the USCG and AMHS investigation) that the steering was acting erratic, I.E.: there was a great deal of rudder lag. I had forgotten at the time (being physically and emotionally drained from the grounding an subsequent investigations) that the Le Conte' had taken a very strong "dive to port whilst passing middle shoal day beacon inbound to Sitka the previous trip. It took a good 20 degrees of rudder to arrest the sheer to port and there was a lag of 10 to fifteen seconds on rudder response. Now the Le Conte is and always has been very quick to answer helm as is it's sister ship the Aurora. In light of this new tendency to sheer and the excessive lag in time

between putting the rudder over and the rudder response it is possible that it could have contributed .04 to .06 mile to the Le Conte's advance and transfer. In recently looking at her maneuvering characteristics and doing several plots I have found that this could have exacerbated the amount to which I was right handed in the channel. Whilst .04 or even .03 mile is not a lot (180' to 240') it could have well made the difference between passing to the left or right of the day beacon #3. So too, it may well have made the difference between passing clear of or fetching up on the reef. That still does not allow for my lack of situational awareness due to fatigue: but as a contributing factor it could have been significant. Disasters, as I learned from my recent bridge resource management class, are seldom, if ever, the result of a single causal event; but are rather, more generally, the cumulative consequence of a series of small events. Admittedly the question of mechanical problems was dismissed by the USCG and myself. In retrospect it could have played a more important part than any one realized. In reviewing the USCG testimony given by the helmsman Rick Burroughs and his subsequent testimony given to the AMHS investigators it becomes apparent that this could be the case. I urge you to review his testimony and perhaps do a follow up interview.

Thanks for looking into this,
Best regards,

Wil Petrich